Astronomers participate in media activities as:

- Individual researchers, and science team members reporting their results
- Distinguished experts commenting on new results presented by other scientists
- Press Officers for the scientific society sponsoring the briefing or for the scientists
- Press officers sometimes have a Co-I who is their team Press Officer
- Large research collaborations (e.g.: SDSS, IceCube) usually have a scientist Spokesperson
- Agency officials, lab directors, etc., hosting or officiating at press conferences

WHY?

- Since astronomy, in most respects, has almost no direct practical application whatsoever, the need to write the popular audience with good results is more important than in other branches of science


- It's strongly encouraged by the leaders of government funding agencies

- To communicate new knowledge to the public

- To develop further public recognition and support for science in general and for Astronomy and space research in particular

- To establish publicly that your program, spacecraft, observatory, telescope, etc. is alive and well and making new discoveries

- Potentially, to enhance your career prospects

WHY NOT?

- If your public announcement, press release, etc. is premature, badly worded, departs from professional norms, greatly exaggerates the originality of the research, or contains information that more closely resembles that of the traditional media. The most successful rates are dozens of hundreds of thousands of readers each month

- Geoff Brumfiel, “Survey finds survey results indicating that a majority of science journalists receive science ideas as proposed to them by their university science writers. Each of the organizations and divisions mentioned above has at least one press officer whom

- From Geoff Brumfiel, © 2009 Macmillan Publishers Limited

WHERE?


- Universities have science writers who write and distribute press releases and articles. The few astronomical websites of you your university or any other institution that does not currently have a real science writer who could write them. They maintain good working relationships with the local media, and are often asked to comment on current topics

- How to get noticed by the Media

- To begin, don’t try to talk about the people who work with the media. They are often looking for good ideas or scientists who are interested in good working with the media

- University science writers are interested in their data and articles. They will often be interested in the work you do, and may be more likely to comment or when a new result

- Funding and mission agencies have public affairs officers that are responsible for press releases on programs that the agencies sponsor. The press releases are proposed to them for communication

- WHAT?

- In the reporting of science news, it's sometimes stated that "newsworthy" subject matter is whatever a reporter is interested in writing about - however, there are some rules of thumb that often apply in selecting news stories in science and especially astronomy

- It involves the discovery of a new phenomenon or object:
  - the largest or closest galaxy
  - the most distant quasar or the nearest exoplanet
  - the most massive Raper Bell Object or the largest comet of the century

- It represents a unique object or situation (a "first")
  - Hamyr's Viozner's "mycological green blof" found by the Galaxy Zoo project
  - the first publication of a new observation observed above the atmosphere in an interplanetary spacecraft before the landing in Earth and being recovered for laboratory study (as happened recently)

- It's the first in situ measurements of particles and fields beyond the heliosphere

- It represents a possible or actual solution to a problem or mystery of long standing: what were the very first galaxies like? what are the dark mater peculiarities in a habitable zone

- The proof of the elliptical mechanism of the solar system

- It constitutes a major milestone in an important project, as in the launch of a spacecraft, its encounter with a planetary object

- "First Light" at a major new telescope

- The first published release of a new telescope or spacecraft

- It has potential general or human interest or represents an opportunity for the public, say, a demonstration of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Something new and easily understood concerning a relevant object that most people have heard about of like Rayleigh's Comet or the Milky Way

- Prediction or detection of an unusual sky phenomenon that will be readily visible

- An opportunity for the public to participate in a research program

- Analyze astronomers' data, as in SETI's home or Galaxy Zoon

- Join the fun for meteorites on the ground from a recent bolide

- It concerns certain hot topics that reporters often cover, such as
  - black holes
  - the Big Bang
  - Dark Energy
  - Astrobiology

- What NOT?

- Some astronomical research is very important to the profession but rarely interests the public, say, the study of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Theoretical explanations for obscure problems

- Observational findings seen as merely incremental, as in the 42.92 km known exoplanet, it's just another hot Jupiter

- Some research reports may be deemed by your professional colleagues to be inappropriate for being featured to the press, for example, when you are reporting work undertaken in a collaboration but are not a designated Spokesperson for the project

- What NOT?

- Some astronomical research is very important to the profession but rarely interests the public, say, the study of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Theoretical explanations for obscure problems

- Observational findings seen as merely incremental, as in the 42.92 km known exoplanet, it's just another hot Jupiter

- Some research reports may be deemed by your professional colleagues to be inappropriate for being featured to the press, for example, when you are reporting work undertaken in a collaboration but are not a designated Spokesperson for the project

- What NOT?

- Some astronomical research is very important to the profession but rarely interests the public, say, the study of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Theoretical explanations for obscure problems

- Observational findings seen as merely incremental, as in the 42.92 km known exoplanet, it's just another hot Jupiter

- Some research reports may be deemed by your professional colleagues to be inappropriate for being featured to the press, for example, when you are reporting work undertaken in a collaboration but are not a designated Spokesperson for the project

- What NOT?

- Some astronomical research is very important to the profession but rarely interests the public, say, the study of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Theoretical explanations for obscure problems

- Observational findings seen as merely incremental, as in the 42.92 km known exoplanet, it's just another hot Jupiter

- Some research reports may be deemed by your professional colleagues to be inappropriate for being featured to the press, for example, when you are reporting work undertaken in a collaboration but are not a designated Spokesperson for the project

- What NOT?

- Some astronomical research is very important to the profession but rarely interests the public, say, the study of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Theoretical explanations for obscure problems

- Observational findings seen as merely incremental, as in the 42.92 km known exoplanet, it's just another hot Jupiter

- Some research reports may be deemed by your professional colleagues to be inappropriate for being featured to the press, for example, when you are reporting work undertaken in a collaboration but are not a designated Spokesperson for the project

- What NOT?

- Some astronomical research is very important to the profession but rarely interests the public, say, the study of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Theoretical explanations for obscure problems

- Observational findings seen as merely incremental, as in the 42.92 km known exoplanet, it's just another hot Jupiter

- Some research reports may be deemed by your professional colleagues to be inappropriate for being featured to the press, for example, when you are reporting work undertaken in a collaboration but are not a designated Spokesperson for the project

- What NOT?

- Some astronomical research is very important to the profession but rarely interests the public, say, the study of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Theoretical explanations for obscure problems

- Observational findings seen as merely incremental, as in the 42.92 km known exoplanet, it's just another hot Jupiter

- Some research reports may be deemed by your professional colleagues to be inappropriate for being featured to the press, for example, when you are reporting work undertaken in a collaboration but are not a designated Spokesperson for the project

- What NOT?

- Some astronomical research is very important to the profession but rarely interests the public, say, the study of a familiar substance / household chemical, like acetic acid in interstellar space

- Theoretical explanations for obscure problems

- Observational findings seen as merely incremental, as in the 42.92 km known exoplanet, it's just another hot Jupiter

- Some research reports may be deemed by your professional colleagues to be inappropriate for being featured to the press, for example, when you are reporting work undertaken in a collaboration but are not a designated Spokesperson for the project